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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning of the humanities at the baccalaureate level were assessed by a blue-ribbon study group of 31 nationally prominent authorities on higher education convened by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Some attention was also given in the context of the humanities to how secondary and graduate education have affected under-graduate education and been affected by it. Answers were sought to three basic questions: (1) What is the condition of learning in the humanities? (2) Why is it as it is? (3) What, if anything, should be done about it? The five sections of the report cover the following topics: (1) Why study the humanities? (2) How should the humanities be taught and learned? (3) How well are the humanities being taught and learned? (4) The role of academic officials in strengthening the place of the humanities; (5) How colleges and universities might do a better job in transmitting the accumulated wisdom of our civilization. Four kinds of information aided discussion: (1) Descriptions of graduation requirements at 15 representative colleges and universities; (2) Reports by study group members on the humanities in secondary education, two year colleges, and graduate schools; (3) Papers by study group members recommending ways to improve teaching and learning in the humanities; (4) Data from several national studies and surveys pertaining to undergraduate education and to the humanities in general. It is noted that over the past 20 years, the place of the humanities in the U.S. undergraduate curriculum has eroded and the overall coherence of the humanities curriculum has declined. To reverse the decline, the report recommends the following: (1) The undergraduate curriculum should be reshaped based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person, regardless of major; (2) Academic officials must make plain what their institutions stand for and what knowledge is regarded as essential to a good education; (3) Faculties must put aside narrow departmentalism and work to shape a challenging common curriculum with a core of studies in history, philosophy, languages, and literature; (4) Excellent teaching should be rewarded through decisions in hiring, promotion, and tenure; (5) The humanities and the study of Western civilization should be placed at the core of the college curriculum, intended for all students and not just for humanities majors. The report closes by identifying a set of specific questions that should be addressed by college presidents, humanities faculty, humanities departments, and the acacemic community in general. (SW/WTB)

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TO RECLAIM A LEGACY

A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education

William J. Bennett

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Fact Sheet (names, addresses, and telephone numbers of study group members)

News Release: "Report on the Humanities in Higher Education Finds Deficiencies and Decline Nationwide in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Suggests Guidelines "To Reclaim a Legacy".

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Our civilization cannot effectively be maintained where it still flourishes, or be restored where it has been crushed, without the revival of the central, continuous and perennial culture of the Western world.

Walter Lippmann, 1941

One reason I wanted to make the gift (was) to remind young people that the liberal arts are still the traditional highway to great thinking and the organization of a life.

James Michener, appearing on the September 26, 1984, CBS Morning News on the occasion of his $2 million gift to Swarthmore College.

FOREWORD

In March 1984 I invited thirty-one prominent teachers, scholars, administrators, and authorities on higher education to join a Study Group on the State of Learning in the Humanities in Higher Education. The study group held three public meetings during the spring and summer to seek answers to three questions: What is the condition of learning in the humanities; why is it as it is; and what, if anything, should be done about it? Our discussion centered on the teaching and learning of the humanities at the baccalaureate level, but we also considered how secondary and graduate education have affected undergraduate education and been affected by it.

The study group was charged with assessing only the state of the humanities, not that of other subjects taught at the college level or higher education generally. That this report does not discuss these other subjects -- notably mathematics, the sciences, and the the social sciences -- is in no way a commentary on their importance. They too are essential to an educated person but lie outside the mandate of our group.

The members of the study group came from research universities, land grant colleges, coeducational liberal arts colleges, women's colleges, historically black colleges, two-year colleges, and secondary schools. They included presidents, vice presidents, deans, and professors, as well as officials of educational and scholarly

associations, a journalist, a foundation officer, and a school principal. They were, in sum, as diverse as the enterprise of education itself.

As one would expect from such a heterogeneous group of capable, experienced individuals, there was often lively discussion, sometimes debate. Despite our different backgrounds and perspectives, however, we found common ground on a number of important points.

The study group's discussions were aided by four kinds of information:

o Detailed descriptions of graduation requirements at fifteen colleges and universities representative of a diversity of institutions.

o Reports prepared by study group members on the humanities in secondary education, two-year colleges, and graduate schools.

o Papers written by individual members of the study group recommending ways to improve teaching and learning in the humanities.

o Data from several national studies and surveys pertaining to undergraduate education and to the humanities in general.

In this report I offer my assessment, based on these meetings, of the state of learning in the humanities in higher education. Although the report is informed to no small degree by the work of the study group, responsibility for authorship belongs to me. Members of the group were shown a draft of the report and asked to comment on it. From their responses, it is clear that they concur with the report's general thrust and with its particular points.

The study group was convened at this particular moment because the time is right for constructive reform of American education. Over the past two years, most of the national attention has been directed to elementary and secondary education. This scrutiny, epitomized by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, has contributed to a number of long-overdue changes, with state and local governments leading the way. Higher education has largely escaped the public's eye except for the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance and occasional studies, commissions, and appeals by higher education specialists. This situation should and will change. Indeed, it has already begun to change with the recent publication of a report from the National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education and the forthcoming report of the Association of American Colleges on the quality of the baccalaureate degree. With more than half of all high school graduates now going on to some form of post-secondary education, the public -- parents, employers, alumni, and the students themselves -- is beginning to ask, and has the

right to ask, whether today's colleges and universities are offering to America's youth an education worthy of our heritage.

This report has five sections. The first, "Why study the humanities?," explores briefly the question of what the humanities are and why they are important to an educated person. The second section, "How should the humanities be taught and learned?," offers the study group's and my thoughts on what constitutes an appropriate education in the humanities. The third section, "How well are the humanities being taught and learned on the nation's campuses?," compares the achievable to the actual, again drawing heavily from the study group's discussions. The fourth section, "The challenge to academic leadership," discusses the role of college presidents and other academic officials in strengthening the place of the humanities. The fifth and final section offers some thoughts on how colleges and universities might do a better job in transmitting the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.

I want to thank the members of the study group for their hard work, their inspired discussions at our meetings, the thoughtful papers they submitted for consideration and discussion, and their helpful suggestions in reviewing a draft of this report. I especially want to thank Daniel Schecter of the Endowment for heading up the staff effort on this project.

INTRODUCTION: TO RECLAIM A LEGACY

Although more than 50 percent of America's high school graduates continue their education at American colleges and universities, few of them can be said to receive there an adequate education in the culture and civilization of which they are members. Most of our college graduates remain shortchanged in the humanities -- history, literature, philosophy, and the ideals and practices of the past that have shaped the society they enter. The fault lies principally with those of us whose business it is to educate these students. We have blamed others, but the responsibility is ours. Not by our words but by our actions, by our indifference, and by our intellectual diffidence we have brought about this condition. It is we the educators -- not scientists, business people, or the general public -- who too often have given up the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs. Thus, what we have on many of our campuses is an unclaimed legacy, a course of studies in which the humanities have been siphoned off, diluted, or so adulterated that students graduate knowing little of their heritage.

In particular, the study group was disturbed by a number of trends and developments in higher education:

o Many of our colleges and universities have lost a clear sense of the importance of the humanities and the purpose of education, allowing the thickness of their catalogues to substitute for vision and a philosophy of education.

o The humanities, and particularly the study of Western civilization, have lost their central place in the undergraduate curriculum. At best, they are but one subject among many that students might be exposed to before graduating. At worst, and too often, the humanities are virtually absent.

o A student can obtain a bachelor's degree from 75 percent of all American colleges and universities without having studied European history; from 72 percent without having studied American literature or history; and from 86 percent without having studied the civilizations of classical Greece and Rome.

o Fewer than half of all colleges and universities now require foreign language study for the bachelor's degree, down from nearly 90 percent in 1966.

o The sole acquaintance with the humanities for many undergraduates comes during their first two years of college, often in ways that discourage further study.

o The number of students choosing majors in the humanities has plummeted. Since 1970 the number of majors in English has declined by 57 percent, in philosophy by 41 percent, in history by 62 percent, and in modern languages by 50 percent.

o Too many students are graduating from American colleges and universities lacking even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and their civilization.

o The decline in learning in the humanities was caused in part by a failure of nerve and faith on the part of many college faculties and administrators, and persists because of a vacuum in educational leadership. A recent study of college presidents found that only 2 percent are active in their institutions' academic affairs.

In order to reverse the decline, the study group recommended:

o The nation's colleges and universities must reshape their undergraduate curricula based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person, regardless of major, and on the study of history, philosophy, languages, and literature.

o College and university presidents must take responsibility for the educational needs of all students in their institutions by making plain what the institution stands for and what knowledge it regards as essential to a good education.

o Colleges and universities must reward excellent teaching in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions.

o Faculties must put aside narrow departmentalism and instead work with administrators to shape a challenging curriculum with a core of common studies.

o Study of the humanities and Western civilization must take its place at the heart of the college curriculum.

I. Why study the humanities?

The federal legislation that established the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1965 defined the humanities as specific disciplines: "language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism, and theory of the arts"; and "those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods." But to define the humanities by itemizing the academic fields they embrace is to overlook the qualities that make them uniquely important and worth studying. Expanding on a phrase from Matthew Arnold, I would describe the humanities as the best that has been said, thought, written, and otherwise expressed about the human experience. The humanities tell us how men and women of our own and other civilizations have grappled with life's enduring, fundamental questions: What is justice? What should be loved? What deserves to be defended? What is courage? What is noble? What is base? Why do civilizations flourish? Why do they decline?

Kant defined the essence of the humanities in four questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for? What is man? These questions are not simply diversions for intellectuals or playthings for the idle. As a result of the ways in which these questions have been answered, civilizations have emerged, nations have developed, wars have been fought, and people have lived contentedly or miserably.

If ideas are important, it surely follows that learning and life are poorer without the humanities. Montaigne wrote:

> A pupil should be taught what it means to know something, and what it means not to know it; what should be the design and end of study; what valor, temperance, and justice are; the difference between ambition and greed, loyalty and servitude, liberty and license; and the marks of true and solid contentment.

Further, the humanities can contribute to an informed sense of community by enabling us to learn about and become participants in a common culture, shareholders in our civilization. But our goal should be more than just a common culture -- even television and the comics can give us that. We should, instead, want all students to know a common culture rooted in civilization's lasting vision, its highest shared ideals and aspirations, and its heritage. Professor E.D. Hirsch of the University of Virginia calls the beginning of this achievement "cultural literacy" and reminds us that "no culture exists that is ignorant of its own traditions." As the late philosopher Charles Frankel once said, it is through the humanities that a civilized society talks to itself about things that matter most.

II. How should the humanities be taught and learned?

Mankind's answers to compelling questions are available to us through the written and spoken word -- books, manuscripts, letters, plays, and oral traditions -- and also in nonliterary forms, which John Ruskin called the book of art. Within them are expressions of human greatness and of pathos and tragedy. In order to tap the consciousness and memory of civilization, one must confront these texts and works of art.

The members of the study group discussed at length the most effective ways to teach the humanities to undergraduates. Our discussion returned continually to two basic prerequisites for learning in the humanities: good teaching and a good curriculum.

(a) Good teaching

Good teaching is at least as essential in the humanities as in other fields of learning. In this connection, it is critical to point out that of all undergraduate credit hours taken in the humanities, 87 percent are taken in the freshman and sophomore years. Because nonhumanities majors account for the largest part of these credit hours, courses taken at the introductory level are the first and only collegiate exposure to the humanities for many students. Therefore, we should want to extend to these students the most attractive invitation to the humanities possible. This requires teachers who can make the humanities live and who can guide students through the landscape of human thought.

Just as students can be drawn to the humanities by good teachers, they can be chased off by poor ones. "Students come to learning through their teachers," wrote Oberlin College Dean Robert Longsworth, "and no list of great works nor any set of curricular requirements can do the work of a good teacher." Although it can take many forms, we all know what poor teaching is. It can be lifeless or tendentious, mechanical or ideological. It can be lacking in conviction. Perhaps most commonly, it can fail to have a sense of the significance of the material it purports to study and teach. It can bore and deaden where it means to quicken and elevate. Giving one example, Harvard Professor David Riesman pointed out that poor teaching can masquerade as good teaching when it "invites students to join a club of sophisticated cynics who are witty, abrasive, and sometimes engrossing; many teachers in the humanities parade and glorify their eccentricities, and only on reflection and at some distance does one realize that they are really lifeless."

What characterizes good teaching in the humanities? First, and foremost, a teacher must have achieved mastery of the material. But this is not enough; there must also be engagement. Professor William Arrowsmith of Emory University described good teachers as "committed to teaching what they have learned to love." In one crucial way, good teachers cannot be dispassionate. They cannot be dispassionate about the works they teach -- assuming that they are teaching important works. This does not mean they advocate each idea of every author, but rather that they are moved and are seen to be moved by the power of the works and are able to convey that power to their students. Just as good scholarship is inspired, so must good teaching be.

(b) A good curriculum

If the teacher is the guide, the curriculum is the path. A good curriculum marks the points of significance so that the student does not wander aimlessly over the terrain, dependent solely on chance to discover the landmarks of human achievement.

Colleges and universities have a responsibility to design general education curricula that identify these landmarks. David Savage of the Los Angeles Times expressed the consensus of the study group when he said: "Most students enter college expecting that the university and its leaders have a clear vision of what is worth knowing and what is important in our heritage that all educated persons should know. They also have a right to expect that the university sees itself as more than a catalogue of courses."

Although the study group embraced the principle that all institutions should accept responsibility for deciding what their graduates should know, most members believed that no single curriculum could be appropriate in all places. The study group recognized the diverse nature of higher education under whose umbrella are institutions with different histories, philosophies, educational purposes, student body characteristics, and religious and cultural traditions. Each institution must decide for itself what it considers an educated person to be and what knowledge that person should possess. While doing so, no institution need act as if it were operating in a vacuum. There are

standards of judgment: Some things are more important to know than others.

The choices a college or university makes for its common curriculum should be rooted firmly in its institutional identity and educational purpose. In successful institutions, an awareness of what the college or university is trying to do acts as a unifying principle, a thread that runs through and ties together the faculty, the curriculum, the students, and the administration. If an institution has no clearly conceived and articulated sense of itself, its efforts to design a curriculum will result in little more than an educational garage sale, possibly satisfying most campus factions but serving no real purpose and adding up to nothing of significance. Developing a common curriculum with the humanities at the core is no easy task. In some institutions it will be difficult to attain. But merely being exposed to a variety of subjects and points of view is not enough. Learning to think critically and skeptically is not enough. Being well rounded is not enough if, after all the sharp edges have been filed down, discernment is blunted and the graduate is left to believe without judgment, to decide without wisdom, or to act without standards.

The study group identified several features common to any good curriculum, regardless of institutional particulars:

(1) Balance between breadth and depth. A good curriculum should embody both wide reading and close reading. Students should study a number of important texts and subjects with thoroughness and care. They

should also become acquainted with other texts and subjects capable of giving them a broader view, a context for understanding what they know well. Excessive concentration in one area, however, often abetted by narrow departmentalism, can promote provincialism and pedantry. Conversely, as William Arrowsmith warned, going too far toward breadth could make the curriculum a mere "bus trip of the West" characterized by "shallow generalization and stereotypes."

(2) Original texts. Most members of the study group believed that the curriculum should be based on original literary, historical, and philosophical texts rather than on secondary works or textbooks. By reading such works, reflecting on them, discussing them, and writing about them, students will come to understand the power of ideas.

(3) Continuity. The undergraduate's study of the humanities should not be limited to the freshman and sophomore years. Rather, it should extend throughout the undergraduate career so that continuing engagement with the humanities will complement and add perspective to courses in the major field as well as contribute to students' increasing intellectual maturity as juniors and seniors. Professor Linda Spoerl of Highline Community College said: "The idea that general education requirements should be satisfied as quickly as possible before the student goes on to the 'real' part of education does everyone a disservice."

(4) Faculty strength. Because a good curriculum must rest on a firm foundation of good teaching, it follows that the nature of that curriculum should respect areas of faculty competence and expertise. As

David Riesman pointed out, it does little good to require study of Shakespeare if there are no scholars on the faculty who can teach Shakespeare with insight and contagious appreciation. On the other hand, any institution that lacks faculty expertise in the basic fields and work of the humanities should take immediate steps to fill those gaps or to develop such competence in existing faculty.

(5) Conviction about the centrality of the humanities. Finally, the humanities must not be argued for as something that will make our students refined, nor should the humanities be presented as a nonrigorous interlude where the young can chew over their feelings, emote, or rehash their opinions. The humanities are not an educational luxury, and they are not just for majors. They are a body of knowledge and a means of inquiry that convey serious truths, defensible judgments, and significant ideas. Properly taught, the humanities bring together the perennial questions of human life with the greatest works of history, literature, philosophy, and art. Unless the humanities are taught and studied in this way, there is little reason to offer them.

Based on our discussions, we recommend the following knowledge in the humanities as essential to a college education:

o Because our society is the product and we the inheritors of Western civilization, American students need an understanding of its origins and development, from its roots in antiquity to the present. This understanding should include a grasp of the major trends in society,

religion, art, literature, and politics, as well as a knowledge of basic chronology.

o A careful reading of several masterworks of English, American, and European literature.

o An understanding of the most significant ideas and debates in the history of philosophy.

o Demonstrable proficiency in a foreign language (either modern or classical) and the ability to view that language as an avenue into another culture.

In addition to these areas of fundamental knowledge, study group members recommended that undergraduates have some familiarity with the history, literature, religion, and philosophy of at least one non-Western culture or civilization. We think it better to have a deeper understanding of a single non-Western culture than a superficial taste of many. Finally, the study group thought that all students should study the history of science and technology.

What should be read?

A curriculum is rarely much stronger than the syllabi of its courses, the arrays of texts singled out for careful reading and discussion. The syllabi should reflect the college's best judgment

concerning specific texts with which an educated person should be familiar and should include texts within the competence and interest of its faculty.

Study group members agreed that an institution's syllabi should not be set in stone; indeed, these syllabi should change from time to time to take into account the expertise of available faculty and the result of continuing scrutiny and refinement. The task, however, is not to take faculty beyond their competence and training, nor to displace students' individual interests and career planning, but to reach and inhabit common ground for a while.

We frequently hear that it is no longer possible to reach a consensus on the most significant thinkers, the most compelling ideas, and the books all students should read. Contemporary American culture, the argument goes, has become too fragmented and too pluralistic to justify a belief in common learning. Although it is easier (and more fashionable) to doubt than to believe, it is a grave error to base a college curriculum on such doubt. Also, I have long suspected that there is more consensus on what the important books are than many people have been willing to admit.

In order to test this proposition and to learn what the American public thinks are the most significant works, I recently invited several hundred educational and cultural leaders to recommend ten books that any high school graduate should have read. The general public was also invited in a newspaper column by George F. Will to send me their lists.

I received recommendations from more than five hundred individuals. They listed hundreds of different texts and authors, yet four -- Shakespeare's plays, American historical documents (the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Federalist Papers), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and the Bible -- were cited at least 50 percent of the time.

I have not done a comparable survey on what college graduates should read, but the point to be made is clear: Many people do believe that some books are more important than others, and there is broader agreement on what those books are than many have supposed. Each college's list will vary somewhat, reflecting the character of the institution and other factors. But there would be, and should be, significant overlap.

I am often asked what I believe to be the most significant works in the humanities. This is an important question, too important to avoid. Some works and their authors have profoundly influenced my life, and it is plain that the same works have influenced the lives of many others as well. In providing a list of these works and authors it is not my intention (nor is it my right) to dictate anyone's curriculum. My purpose is not to prescribe a course of studies but to answer, as candidly as I can, an oft-asked question.

The works and authors I mention virtually define the development of the Western mind. There are, at a number of institutions, strong introductory courses already in place whose syllabi include such works. These institutions do not expect undergraduates to read most of the

major works of these authors. They have learned, however, that it is not unreasonable to expect students to read works by some of them and to know who the others were and why they are important.

The works and authors I have in mind include, but are not limited to, the following: from classical antiquity -- Homer, Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, and Vergil; from medieval, Renaissance, and seventeenth-century Europe -- Dante, Chaucer, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Milton, and Locke; from eighteenth- through twentieth-century Europe -- Swift, Rousseau, Austen, Wordsworth, Tocqueville, Dickens, George Eliot, Dostoyevsky, Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Mann, and T. S. Eliot; from American literature and historical documents -- the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the Constitution, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address, Martin Luther King, Jr's. "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" and "I have a dream . . ." speech, and such authors as Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and Faulkner. Finally, I must mention the Bible, which is the basis for so much subsequent history, literature and philosophy. At a college or university, what weight is given to which authors must of course depend on faculty competence and interest. But should not every humanities faculty possess some members qualified to teach at least something of these authors?

Why these particular books and these particular authors? Because an important part of education is learning to read, and the highest purpose of reading is to be in the company of great souls. There are, to be sure, many fine books and important authors not included in the list,

and they too deserve the student's time and attention. But to pass up the opportunity to spend time with this company is to miss a fundamental experience of higher education.

Great souls do not express themselves by the written word only; they also paint, sculpt, build, and compose. An educated person should be able not only to recognize some of their works, but also to understand why they embody the best in our culture. Should we be satisfied if the graduates of our colleges and universities know nothing of the Parthenon's timeless classical proportions, of the textbook in medieval faith and philosophy that is Chartres cathedral, of Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling, or of the music of Bach and Mozart?

III. How well are the humanities being taught and learned on the nation's campuses?

Our experience in higher education and study of empirical data convince us that the humanities are being taught and learned with uneven success. Some institutions do an outstanding job, some a poor one. At most colleges and universities the humanities are taught both well and poorly, with inspiration in one classroom, excruciating dullness or pedantry in another. Overall, however, both teaching and learning in the humanities are not what they should be or can be, and they are neither taught as well nor studied as carefully as they deserve to be.

Evidence for this decline is compelling. Preliminary findings from a 1984-85 survey by the American Council on Education indicate that a student can obtain a bachelor's degree from 75 percent of all American colleges and universities without having studied European history; from 72 percent without having studied American literature or history; and from 86 percent without having studied the civilizations of classical Greece and Rome. The Modern Language Association reports that both entrance and graduation requirements in foreign languages have been weakened significantly since 1966. In that year, 33 percent of all colleges and universities required some foreign language study for admission. By 1975, only 18 percent required a foreign language, and by 1983 only 14 percent. The picture is similar for graduation requirements. In 1966, 89 percent of all institutions required foreign language study for the bachelor's degree, dropping to 53 percent in 1975 and 47 percent in 1983.

Conventional wisdom attributes the steep drop in the number of students who major in the humanities to their concern for finding good-paying jobs after college. Although there is some truth in this, we believe that there is another, equally important reason -- namely, that we in the academy have failed to bring the humanities to life and to insist on their value. From 1970 to 1982 the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in all fields <u>increased</u> by 11 percent from 846,110 to 952,998. But during the same period, degrees in English <u>dropped</u> not by a few percentage points, but by 57 percent, in philosophy by 41 percent, in history by 62 percent, and in modern languages by 50 percent.

Indications are that the decline is continuing. From 1975 to 1983 the number of high school seniors who took the SAT exam and specified an intended college major rose by 14 percent. Over the same eight-year period, the number who planned to major in the humanities fell by 42 percent. Prospective history majors decreased by 60 percent.

If further evidence of students' estrangement from the humanities is required, one need only refer to the American Council on Education's 1983 survey of academic deans at colleges and universities. Two-thirds of those surveyed indicated that the most able entering undergraduates were turning away from the humanities to other fields, mainly professional and technical. This is not merely a rejection of a career in the humanities, but a rejection of the humanities themselves. The former is not a cause for alarm; the latter is.

Impressionistic or anecdotal evidence for the decline of the humanities surfaces every time I talk with college professors, academic officers, and students. Such evidence is familiar: students who graduate from college unable to write lucidly or reason clearly and rigorously; students who are preoccupied (even obsessed) with vocational goals at the expense of broadening the intellect; students who are ignorant of philosophy and literature and know and care little about the history of their nation and their culture. For example, I know of one university philosophy professor who administers a simple test to his students at the beginning of classes each year to determine how much prior knowledge he can presume. The test consists of identifying twenty important names and events from history (such as Shakespeare, St.

Augustine, Beethoven, the Protestant Reformation, and Rembrandt). On the most recent test, his students -- mainly sophomores and juniors -- correctly identified an average of only six of the twenty.

I must emphasize here that our aim is not to argue for more majors in the humanities, but to state as emphatically as we can that the humanities should have a place in the education of all. Our nation is significantly enriched by the breadth and diversity of its professions and occupations and the interests of its citizens. Our universities should continue to encourage instruction in a full variety of fields and careers. But we do argue that, whatever endeavors our students ultimately choose, some substantial quality instruction in the humanities should be an integral part of everyone's collegiate education. To study the humanities in no way detracts from the career interests of students. Properly taught, they will enrich all.

The state of teaching in the humanities

If learning in the humanities is in decline, at least some of the blame must be assigned to those who teach the humanities and to academic administrators who determine the allocation of institutional resources. The study group criticized some universities for surrendering the teaching of introductory and lower division courses to graduate assistants or adjunct, part-time faculty. In making these criticisms the study group recognized that classes taught by adjunct faculty and graduate students allow the institution to serve more students per faculty salary dollar, and that it is necessary to give future professors

experience in the classroom. Nevertheless, the study group was concerned that such persons are not, as a group, the best teachers -- the most experienced, most accomplished, and most intellectually mature. They are not capable of extending the most attractive invitation to the humanities to those lower division students who account for nearly 90 percent of all humanities credit hours taken. If students do not experience the best the humanities have to offer early in their undergraduate careers, they are unlikely to come back for more. University of Chicago Professor Wayne Booth said in his 1982 presidential address to the Modern Language Association:

> We have chosen -- no one required it of us -- to say to the world, almost in so many words, that we do not care who teaches the nonmajors or under what conditions, so long as the troublesome hordes move on and out: forced in by requirements, forced out by discouragement, or by disgust, or by literal failure. The great public fears or despises us because we hire a vast army of underpaid flunkies to teach the so-called service courses, so that we can gladly teach, in our advanced courses, those precious souls who survive the gauntlet. Give us lovers and we will love them, but do not expect us to study courtship. If we had decided to run up a flag on the quad saying that we care not a whit whether our society consists of people who practice critical understanding, so long as we are left free to teach advanced courses, we could not have given a clearer message.

And Frank Vandiver, President of Texas A&M University, recently

analyzed the problem this way: "The liberal arts . . . have allowed this to happen to themselves. They have allowed themselves to sit behind ivy-covered walls and say, 'We are the liberal arts and to hell with you.'"

The problem is more than just who does the teaching; it is also how the humanities are taught. Too often introductory humanities courses are taught as if they were initial preparation for majors rather than as general education for all students. This often contributes to a fragmented, compartmentalized curriculum instead of an integrated, coherent one. When the humanities are presented as a series of isolated disciplinary packages, students cannot possibly see the interrelatedness of great works, ideas, and minds.

The study group was alarmed by the tendency of some humanities professors to present their subjects in a tendentious, ideological manner. Sometimes the humanities are used as if they were the handmaiden of ideology, subordinated to particular prejudices and valued or rejected on the basis of their relation to a certain social stance.

At the other extreme, the humanities are declared to have no inherent meaning because all meaning is subjective and relative to one's own perspective. There is no longer agreement on the value of historical facts, empirical evidence, or even rationality itself.

Both these tendencies developed in the hope that we will again show students the relevance of our subjects. Instead of demonstrating

relevance, however, they condemn the humanities to irrelevance -- the first, by subordinating our studies to contemporary prejudices; the second, by implying that the great works no longer have anything to teach us about ourselves or about life. As David Riesman said, some students are captivated by these approaches and think them modern or sophisticated. But the vast majority of students have correctly thought otherwise and have chosen to vote with their feet, stampeding out of the humanities departments. We cannot blame this on an insufficient number of students, or on the quality of students, or even on the career aspirations of students. We must blame ourselves, for our failure to protect and transmit a legacy our students deserve to know.

Effects of graduate education on teaching

Instead of aiming at turning out men and women of broad knowledge and lively intellect, our graduate schools produce too many narrow specialists whose teaching is often lifeless, stilted, and pedestrian. In his recent lecture to the American Council of Learned Societies, Yale Professor Maynard Mack took graduate schools to task for failing to educate broadly:

> When one reads thoughtfully in the works by Darwin, Marx, and Freud, what one finds most impressive is not the competence they show in the studies we associate them with, though that is of course impressive, but the range of what they knew, the staggering breadth of the reading which they had made their own and without which, one comes to understand, they could never have achieved the

> insights in their own areas that we honor them for. Today, it seems to me, we are still moving mostly in the opposite direction,despite here and there a reassuring revolt. We are narrowing, not enlarging our horizons. We are shucking, not assuming our responsibilities. And we communicate with fewer and fewer because it is easier to jabber in a jargon than to explain a complicated matter in the real language of men. How long can a democratic nation afford to support a narcissistic minority so transfixed by its own image?

University of Oregon Dean Robert Berdahl described the problem as one of acculturation and unrealistic expectations. Dean Berdahl observed that most of today's college faculty were trained during the 1960s and early 1970s, a period of rapid growth in the academic sector and increasing private and government support for research. As a result, they are oriented more toward research, publication, and teaching graduate students than toward educating nonmajors and generalists. "The successful career to which one is taught to aspire," wrote Dean Berdahl, "is to end up at an institution like that at which one received one's doctorate, where the 'real work' of the profession takes place and where, if one must teach undergraduates, one need only deal with majors or very bright students."

When these former graduate students secure jobs in our college classrooms, they find themselves poorly equipped to teach undergraduates. Again, Robert Berdahl:

English professors insist that they are not able to teach composition, so that must be left to graduate students or a growing group of underpaid itinerant instructors. Historians who used to be responsible for teaching the entire sweep of Western civilization or the Survey of American History now insist on teaching only that portion of it that corresponds to their specialties. Foreign literature specialists consider it a waste of their talent to teach foreign language classes. Lower division, general education courses are thus often conceptually no different from the upper division courses offered for majors and graduate students; they are only broader. Instead of asking: "What should a student learn from this 'Civ' class or 'Intro to Lit' class if this is the only history or literature class he or she will take in four years?", we ask: "What will best prepare the student to take advanced literature or history classes?"

Graduate education's tendencies toward what Mellon Foundation President John Sawyer called "hyper-specialization and self-isolating vocabularies" often result in a faculty that, even after several years of advanced study, are no better educated than the undergraduates. John Silber, president of Boston University, wrote in a letter to me:

The Ph.D. is no longer a guarantee that its holder is truly educated. Everyone has seen the consequences of this: How frequently we now meet Ph.D.'s who are incapable of writing correctly or speaking effectively; who are so narrow in their interests that the civilizing effect of the humanities appears to

have been entirely lost upon them; who are so jejune in their research interests as to call into question the entire scholarly enterprise.

In a recent article, Harvard Professor Walter Jackson Bate warned that "the humanities are not merely entering, they are plunging into their worst state of crisis since the modern university was formed a century ago in the 1880s." Professor Bate went on to exhort graduate humanities departments to examine their priorities:

> The subject matter -- the world's great literature -- is unrivaled. All we need is the chance and the imagination to help it work upon the minds and characters of the millions of students to whom we are responsible. Ask that the people you are now breeding up in departments, and to whom you now give tenure appointments, be capable of this.

Training good researchers is vital to the humanities and to the mission of every graduate school. But many graduate schools have become so preoccupied with training narrow research specialists that they no longer address adequately the more pressing need of higher education for good teachers, broadly versed in their fields, inspired by the power of their subjects, and committed to making those subjects speak to the undergraduate. Unless our graduate schools reexamine their priorities, much of our teaching will remain mediocre and our students indifferent.

The state of the humanities curriculum

The past twenty years have seen a steady erosion in the place of the humanities in the undergraduate curriculum and in the coherence of the curriculum generally. So serious has this erosion become that Mark Curtis, president of the Association of American Colleges, wrote: "The chaotic state of the baccalaureate curriculum may be the most urgent and troubling problem of higher education in the final years of the twentieth century." Clark Kerr has called the undergraduate curriculum "a disaster area," and Professor Frederick Rudolph of Williams College has written:

> . . . when the professors abandoned a curriculum that they thought students needed they substituted for it one that, instead, catered either to what the professors needed or what the students wanted. The results confirmed the authority of professors and students but they robbed the curriculum of any authority at all. The reaction of students to all this activity in the curriculum was brilliant. They concluded that the curriculum really didn't matter.

A collective loss of nerve and faith on the part of both faculty and academic administrators during the late 1960s and early 1970s was undeniably destructive of the curriculum. When students demanded a greater role in setting their own educational agendas, we eagerly responded by abandoning course requirements of any kind and with them the intellectual authority to say to students what the outcome of a college education ought to be. With intellectual authority relinquished, we found that we did not need to worry about what was worth knowing, worth

defending, worth believing. The curriculum was no longer a statement about what knowledge mattered; instead, it became the product of a political compromise among competing schools and departments overlaid by marketing considerations. In a recent article Frederick Rudolph likened the curriculum to "a bazaar and the students [to] tourists looking for cheap bargains."

Once the curriculum was dissolved, colleges and universities found it difficult to reconstruct because of the pressures of the marketplace. All but the most selective institutions must now compete for scarce financial resources -- students' tuition and enrollment-driven state subsidies. As a consequence, many are reluctant to reinstate meaningful course requirements for fear of frightening away prospective applicants. (I believe such a fear is misplaced, but more on this later.)

Intellectual authority came to be replaced by intellectual relativism as a guiding principle of the curriculum. Because colleges and universities believed they no longer could or should assert the primacy of one fact or one book over another, all knowledge came to be seen as relative in importance, relative to consumer or faculty interest. This loss was accompanied by a shift in language. The desired ends of education changed from knowledge to "inquiry," from content to "skills." We began to see colleges listing their objectives as teaching such skills as reading, critical thinking, and awareness of other points of view. These are undeniably essential ends to a college education, but they are not sufficient. One study group member said, "What good is knowing how to write if you are ignorant of the finest examples of the

language?" Failure to address content allows colleges and universities to beg the question of what an educated man or woman in the 1980s needs to know. The willingness of too many colleges to act as if all learning were relative is a self-inflicted wound that has impaired our ability to defend our subjects as necessary for learning or important for life.

Effects of the curriculum on secondary education

It is not surprising that once colleges and universities decided the curriculum did not have to represent a vision of an educated person, the secondary schools (and their students) took the cue and reached the same conclusion. Vanderbilt University Professor Chester Finn pointed out that college entrance requirements constitute de facto high school exit requirements for high school graduates -- now nearly six of every ten -- who seek postsecondary education. With exit requirements relaxed, college-bound students no longer perceive a need to take electives in English and history, let alone foreign languages. Instead, they choose courses thought to offer immediate vocational payoff. Clifford Adelman described research for the National Commission on Excellence in Education that dramatically illustrates this trend. From 1969 to 1981 the humanities have declined as a percentage of total high school credits taken, a decline parallel to that in the colleges. Credits in Western civilization are down 50 percent, in U.S. history down 20 percent, and in U.S. government down 70 percent. My own experience attests to the woeful state of the high school curriculum. Recently I met with seventy high school student leaders -- all excellent students -- from all over the country. When I asked them how many had heard of the Federalist Papers,

only seven raised their hands.

As enrollments in basic high school humanities courses fell off, it became more difficult for the schools to justify keeping them. Therefore, many schools dropped humanities courses from the curriculum. When high school graduates enter college, they are poorly prepared in basic knowledge of the humanities as well as in such essential skills as reading and writing. The remedial courses needed by these students cut into the college curriculum, effectively reducing the amount of actual college level course work they can take.

Twenty years ago, William Arrowsmith wrote: "Our entire educational enterprise is . . . founded upon the wholly false premise that at some prior stage the essential educational work has been done." Sadly, this is still true today. The humanities must be put back into the high school curriculum, but this is unlikely to happen unless they are first restored in the colleges. If colleges take the lead in reinstating humanities course requirements, the high schools will surely respond. Evidence of this was related by Professor Noel Reynolds of Brigham Young University, who described how college preparatory course enrollments in Utah's high schools rose after an announcement by the state's two largest universities that preference for admission would be given to students who had completed college preparatory, including humanities, courses. Some Utah secondary schools reported an increase in foreign language enrollments of as much as 200 percent, and only slightly less dramatic increases in English and history.

Bright spots in the curriculum

The study group examined in depth the graduation requirements of numerous colleges and universities. The group found enormous variety, ranging from no course requirements of any kind to sequences of highly prescriptive core courses. Types or curricula did not seem to be associated with types of institutions. Some of the least coherent curricula were those of nationally prestigious, highly selective institutions, while some of the most carefully defined were found at less selective local or regional institutions. The most common type of curriculum was the "distribution requirements" model, in which students selected courses from a limited list of regular departmental offerings within a few broad interdepartmental clusters. Typically, "the humanities" is one of the clusters. Often the humanities requirement can be satisfied by taking such courses as speech, remedial writing, or performing arts. Even in institutions where the humanities are defined more rigorously, distribution requirements rarely guarantee that a student will master an explicit body of knowledge or confront a series of important original texts.

A few colleges and universities have rejected this model in favor of a course of studies in which all students share a carefully designed learning experience. Some colleges and universities have been doing this for a long time and have remained steadfast in their commitment. Others have moved in recent years to restore a sound common curriculum. Two of the latter captured the attention of the study group: Brooklyn College and St. Joseph's College.

Brooklyn College, part of the City University of New York system, has about 14,000 undergraduates, many of whom are recent immigrants. Most major in professional fields such as pre-law, accounting, and communications. Yet since 1981 all bachelor's degree candidates, regardless of major, have taken a sequence of ten core courses, seven of which are in the humanities. Many of the courses emphasize original texts. For example, Core Studies 1, "Classical Origins of Western Culture," requires readings in Homer, Sophocles, Herodotus, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Vergil, and other writers of classical antiquity. Brooklyn's success with the core curriculum has surpassed all expectations. The college reports that its faculty (50 percent of whom teach in the core) are enlivened intellectually by teaching the core courses and that students' writing has improved considerably as a result of a "Writing Across the Core" program. Students, too, are excited by the new curriculum. They say they are able to see relationships among fields, and they talk about a renewed sense of a community of learning, a community that includes faculty, students, and administrators. The administration's commitment to the curriculum can be seen in the fact that both the president and provost teach core courses.

Although it is a very different kind of institution, St. Joseph's College in Indiana has developed a similar curriculum with equally good results. St. Joseph's is a Catholic school of about 1,000 students. Business, finance, and computer science are popular majors. Like Brooklyn College, St. Joseph's requires a sequence of ten core courses. St. Joseph's differs from Brooklyn in distributing these courses over all four years, whereas Brooklyn's core courses are concentrated in the first

two. The Brooklyn and St. Joseph's cores also share curricular coherence in the way courses are arranged in logical progression, each course building upon the previous one. All core courses at St. Joseph's involve the humanities. There is tremendous enthusiasm for the core approach among faculty, two-thirds of whom teach core courses. Even more telling is the enthusiasm of St. Joseph's alumni, who frequently write faculty to praise the core as an outstanding feature of their college career.

Among two-year colleges, where vocational training is so important to the institutional mission, some schools have recognized the need for a strong common curriculum in the humanities. Kirkwood Community College in Iowa is a noteworthy example. Kirkwood serves about 6,000 students, half of whom are enrolled in liberal arts degree programs. In 1979, several faculty and administrators formed a Humanities Committee to review the humanities curriculum and recommend improvements. The committee developed and obtained approval for a new twenty-hour humanities core requirement. Candidates for the Associate of Arts degree now select from a very limited list of challenging academic courses--in literature, history, philosophy, and languages--which concentrate on reading primary texts and require extensive student writing.

The experience of Brooklyn College, St. Joseph's College, and Kirkwood Community College proves that the drift toward curricular disintegration can be reversed, that colleges and universities -- and not just the elite ones -- can become true communities of learning, and that it is possible even in this age of skepticism to educate students on the principle that certain areas of knowledge are essential for every college

graduate. Their experience also belies the oft-heard fear that students will reject or avoid such a structured curriculum. Intellectually challenging, well-taught courses, whether required or not, will attract good students, and any college that offers a curriculum of such courses will not lack applicants.

IV. The challenge to academic leadership

Revitalizing an educational institution is not easy. Usually it requires uncommon courage and discernment on the part of a few and a shared vision of what can and ought to be on the part of many. Higher education may now be more receptive to decisive leadership than it has been for some time. As University of Puget Sound President Philip Phibbs observed, most colleges and universities sense a crisis on the way and are concerned about the future. Administrators and faculty alike are beginning to perceive that what has traditionally been good for this or that department, one school or another, may be harmful to the institution as a whole and to its overall educational mission.

Recently, educational researchers sought to determine those factors that make some elementary and secondary schools more successful than others. Among the most important was strong leadership from the school principal. Although colleges and universities are more complex institutions than secondary schools, with far stronger fragmenting tendencies, leadership plays the same crucial role.

Curricular reform must begin with the president. In their research on presidential leadership, Clark Kerr and David Riesman found that only 2 percent of the more than seven hundred college and university presidents interviewed described themselves as playing a major role in academic affairs. This is an alarming finding. A president should be the chief academic officer of the institution, not just the chief administrative recruitment, or fund raising officer. The president and other principal academic officers (provosts, deans, vice presidents for academic affairs) are solely accountable for all its parts and the needs of all its students. They are ultimately responsible for the quality of the education these students receive.

Members of the study group -- which included several deans and presidents -- believed strongly that presidents can be an effective force for curricular change only if they define their role accordingly. Bucknell University's Frances Fergusson said that a president's role is to "define, articulate, and defend institutional goals and to redirect the energies of the faculty towards these broader concerns." David Riesman characterized a good president as having "a combination of persuasiveness, patience, ingenuity, even stubbornness." Philip Phibbs said that a president must "have the courage to state and insist upon important, and often uncomfortable, if not initially unacceptable, ideas."

There are a number of concrete steps presidents can take to strengthen the humanities within their institutions. Roland Dille, president of Moorhead State College, said that "in the dozens of speeches that a president makes there ought to be some sign of his having been

touched by the humanities." Beyond this, he can set standards for excellence in undergraduate teaching and see that they are met by hiring deans, provosts, and faculty who are committed to those standards. President Hanna Gray of the University of Chicago urged her fellow presidents to "insist on certain priorities" and to "raise certain questions and insist that they be answered." Donald Stewart, president of Spelman College, showed that a president who views himself as an academic leader can make a real difference. From the beginning of his presidency at Spelman, Stewart sought to cut through the prevalent vocational orientation by stating openly and repeatedly that the humanities are basic to Spelman's mission, and in so doing set a new intellectual tone for the institution. Such statements by institutional leaders must, of course, be accompanied by actions. Among these, and not the least important, is rewarding good teaching in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions.

But as Frederick Rudolph has frequently pointed out, the curriculum cannot be reformed without the enthusiastic support of the faculty. Institutions such as Brooklyn College, St. Joseph's College, and Kirkwood Community College were able to implement strong curricula because their administrators and faculty worked together toward a common goal, not in opposition to one another or to protect departmental turf. Philip Phibbs called upon humanities faculty to recognize their common interests:

> Leadership . . . must also come from the humanities faculty itself. This group must assert itself aggressively within the larger faculty and make its case with confidence and clarity. In

too many cases, I think, faculty members in the humanities assume that any intelligent human being, and certainly any intelligent faculty colleague, understands the value of the humanities. It should not, therefore, be necessary to articulate the case. This is a dangerous and misguided assumption.

V. Concluding thoughts

The humanities are important, not to just a few scholars, gifted students, or armchair dilettantes, but to any person who would be educated. They are important precisely because they embody mankind's age-old effort to ask the questions that are central to human existence. As Robertson Davies told a college graduating class, "a university education is meant to enlarge and illuminate your life." A college education worthy of the name must be constructed upon a foundation of the humanities. Unfortunately, our colleges and universities do not always give the humanities their due. All too often teaching is lifeless, arid, and without commitment. On too many campuses the curriculum has become a self-service cafeteria through which students pass without being nourished. Many academic leaders lack the confidence to assert that the curriculum should stand for something more than salesmanship, compromise, or special interest politics. Too many colleges and universities have no clear sense of their educational mission and no conception of what a graduate of their institution ought to know or be.

The solution is not a return to an earlier time when the classical

curriculum was the only curriculum and college was available to only a privileged few. American higher education today serves far more people and many more purposes than it did a century ago. Its increased accessibility to women, racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, and students of limited means is a positive accomplishment of which our nation is rightly proud. As higher education broadened, the curriculum became more sensitive to the long-overlooked cultural achievements of many groups, what Janice Harris of the University of Wyoming referred to as "a respect for diversity." This too is a good thing. But our eagerness to assert the virtues of pluralism should not allow us to sacrifice the principle that formerly lent substance and continuity to the curriculum, namely that each college and university should recognize and accept its vital role as conveyor of the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.

We are a part and a product of Western civilization. That our society was founded upon such principles as justice, liberty, government with the consent of the governed, and equality under the law is the result of ideas descended directly from great epochs of Western civilization -- Enlightenment England and France, Renaissance Florence, and Periclean Athens. These ideas, so revolutionary in their times yet so taken for granted now, are the glue that binds together our pluralistic nation. The fact that we as Americans -- whether black or white, Asian or Hispanic, rich or poor -- share these beliefs aligns us with other cultures of the Western tradition. It is not ethnocentric or chauvinistic to acknowledge this. No student citizen of our civilization should be denied access to the best that tradition has to offer.

Ours is not, of course, the only great cultural tradition the world has seen. There are others, and we should expect an educated person to be familiar with them because they have produced art, literature, and thought that are compelling monuments to the human spirit and because they have made significant contributions to our history. Those who know nothing of these other traditions can neither appreciate the uniqueness of their own nor understand how their own fits with the larger world. They are less able to understand the world in which they live. The college curriculum must take the non-Western world into account, not out of political expediency or to appease interest groups, but out of respect for its importance in human history. But the core of the American college curriculum -- its heart and soul -- should be the civilization of the West, source of the most powerful and pervasive influences on America and all of its people. It is simply not possible for students to understand their society without studying its intellectual legacy. If their past is hidden from them, they will become aliens in their own culture, strangers in their own land.

Restoring the humanities to their central place in the curriculum is a task each college and university will have to accomplish for itself, its faculty and administrators working together toward a common goal with all the vision, judgment, and wisdom they can muster. Every institution has its own unique character, problems, sense of purpose, and circumstances; a successful approach at one school may be impractical at another.

Instead of listing formal recommendations, this report concludes

with some questions. We believe that if colleges and universities ask these questions of themselves and honestly answer them, the process of reform will have begun.

Questions for the academic community of each institution:

- Does the curriculum on your campus ensure that a graduate with a bachelor's degree will be conversant with the best that has been thought and written about the human condition?

- Does your curriculum reflect the best judgment of the president, deans, and faculty about what an educated person ought to know, or is it a mere smorgasbord or an expression of appeasement politics?

- Is your institution genuinely committed to teaching the humanities to undergraduates? Do your best professors teach introductory and lower division courses? Are these classes designed for the nonmajor and are they part of a coherent curriculum?

Questions for college and university presidents:

- Do you set an intellectual tone for the institution, articulating goals and ideals?

- Do you take a firm stand on what your institution regards as essential knowledge?

- Do you reward excellent teaching as well as good research in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions?

Questions for humanities faculty:

- Does your teaching make the humanities come alive by helping students confront great texts, great minds, and great ideas?

- Are you as concerned with teaching the humanities to nonmajors as you are with signing up departmental majors?

Questions for graduate humanities departments:

- Are your graduates prepared to teach central humanities texts to undergraduates in addition to being trained as researchers and scholars?

- Are your graduates broadly educated in fields of knowledge other than their primary one? As scholars, are they concerned only with pursuing research of narrow scope or are they able as well to ask questions of wide significance?

We conclude with these questions because the spirit of higher education in a free society is the spirit of knowledge and inquiry, the

framing of important questions in the vigorous search for good and truthful answers. First, however, we must ask the important questions of ourselves, of our institutions, of our faculties, and of our curricula. We must assure ourselves that the answers we live by are true and valuable. Are we teaching what we should? Are we teaching it as well as we can? No college or university, if it is honest with itself, concerned for its students, and mindful of its largest responsibilities, will reject such questions out of hand or dismiss them with easy affirmatives or conventional excuses.

More than four decades ago, Walter Lippmann observed that "what enables men to know more than their ancestors is that they start with a knowledge of what their ancestors have already learned." "A society," he added, "can be progressive only if it conserves its tradition." The challenge to our colleges and universities, I believe, is to conserve and transmit that tradition, understanding that they do this not merely to pay homage to the wisdom of the past but to prepare wisely for the future.

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STUDY GROUP ON THE STATE OF LEARNING IN THE HUMANITIES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Study Group on the State of Learning in the Humanities in Higher Education was convened by Humanities Endowment chairman William J. Bennett in March 1984. The group met for three, day-long public meetings in Washington, D.C., on April 24, June 8, and July 24. This report, "To Reclaim a Legacy," written by Bennett, is the result of their work.

Dr. Bennett describes the composition of the group and the complexity of their task on pages i through v of the Foreword to the report. There he thanks them for their "hard work, inspired discussions, thoughtful papers, and helpful suggestions."

The study group members contributed their time and expertise to the Endowment without compensation. They were, however, reimbursed for the cost of their travel to and from Washington, D.C., and for the costs of their meals and lodging while in Washington.

An alphabetical listing of members of the group, including business addresses and telephone numbers, is attached.

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11/21/84

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EMBARGOED UNTIL: 12:01 A.M., Monday November 26, 1984

REPORT ON THE HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION FINDS DEFICIENCIES AND DECLINE NATIONWIDE IN CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING, SUGGESTS GUIDELINES "TO RECLAIM A LEGACY"

WASHINGTON, November 26 -- William J. Bennett, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), today issued a report that finds most college students "shortchanged in the humanities, lacking even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and their civilization." The report says that "the fault lies principally with those of us whose business it is to educate these students."

The report, "To Reclaim a Legacy," written by Bennett, is the result of the work of 31 nationally prominent teachers, scholars, administrators and authorities on higher education whom Bennett convened as a study group in March 1984. The group held three public meetings during the spring and summer.

"We have blamed others but the responsibility is ours," the report states. "Not by our words but by our actions, by our indifference, we have brought about this condition. It is we the educators who too often have given up the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs.

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"Thus, what we have on many of our campuses is an unclaimed legacy, a course of studies in which the humanities have been siphoned off, diluted, or so adulterated that students graduate knowing little of their heritage."

The report focuses sharply on what it describes as the two basic prerequisites for learning in the humanities -- good teaching and good curriculum -- and makes recommendations for improvement in both.

"Properly taught," the report says, "the humanities bring together the perennial questions of human life with the greatest works of history, literature, philosophy, and art."

"At most colleges and universities the humanities are taught both well and poorly, with inspiration in one classroom, excruciating dullness or pedantry in another."

Noting that 87 percent of all undergraduate credit hours in the humanities are taken in the freshman and sophomore years, largely by non-humanities majors, the report urges the need for "teachers who can make the humanities live and who can guide students through the landscape of human thought."

All too often, the report asserts, teaching can be "lifeless or tendentious, mechanical or ideological. On too many campuses the curriculum has become a self-service cafeteria through which students pass without being nourished."

The report observes, "If the teacher is the guide, the curriculum is the path. A good curriculum marks the points of significance so that the student does not wander aimlessly over the terrain, dependent solely on chance to discover the landmarks of human achievement."

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The report cites the recent efforts of such institutions as Brooklyn College, St. Joseph's College in Indiana and Kirkwood Community College in Iowa as "bright spots." There, in recent years, "the drift toward curricular disintegration has been reversed."

Central to the report's considerations are such basic questions as "Why study the humanities?" and "How should the humanities be taught and learned?"

The report argues that "the past twenty years have seen a steady erosion in the place of the humanities in the undergraduate curriculum." It describes a condition in which students "have chosen to vote with their feet, stampeding out of humanities departments." It warns that "if students do not experience the best the humanities have to offer early in their undergraduate careers, they are unlikely to come back for more."

In order to reverse the decline, the report recommends:

* The nation's colleges and universities must reshape their undergraduate curricula based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person, regardless of major, and on the study of history, philosophy, languages and literature.
* College and university presidents must take responsibility for the educational needs of all students in their institutions by making plain what the institution stands for and what knowledge it regards as essential to a good education.
* Faculties must put aside narrow departmentalism and instead work with administrators to shape a challenging common curriculum with a core of common studies.
* Colleges and universities must reward excellent teaching in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions.

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* Study of the humanities and Western civilization must take its place at the heart of the college curriculum.

The report stresses that its aim is not to argue for more majors in the humanities, but to "state emphatically that the humanities should have a place in the education of all," that they are "not an educational luxury and they are not just for majors."

"Our nation is significantly enriched by the breadth and diversity of its professions and occupations, and the interests of its citizens," the report observes. "Our universities should continue to encourage instruction in a full variety of fields and careers.

"But we do argue that, whatever endeavors our students ultimately choose, some substantial instruction in the humanities should be an integral part of everyone's collegiate education. To study the humanities in no way detracts from the career interests of students. Properly taught, they will enrich all."

Members of the study group include Mark H. Curtis, president, Association of American Colleges; Hanna H. Gray, president, University of Chicago; Diane Ravitch, adjunct professor of history and education, Teacher's College, Columbia University; David Riesman, professor of sociology, Harvard University; John E. Sawyer, president, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; John R. Silber, president, Boston University; Linda Spoerl, professor of English, Highline Community College; and Donald M. Stewart, president, Spelman College.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency that supports research, scholarship, education and general programs in the humanities.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A fact sheet including the names, addresses and telephone numbers of members of the study group is attached.